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Oppression in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

This present article analyses how the unfair treatment, domination and suppression to oppress the people in a patriarchal society in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Oppression means cruelty, injustice, repression and ill treatment of authority for a long period. Writers like Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison have written about oppression in their works. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the leading novelists of Nigeria. Religions, coming of age, conflict and Nigerian politics are the predominant themes in *Purple Hibiscus*. However, she gives importance to oppression which is prior in postcolonial Nigeria. Adichie significantly shows main character's stubbornness in facing violence, ceaseless brutality and threats in her novel especially through Papa who is an intolerant man. It is through Papa that she discloses how he controls the life of main characters psychologically, mentally and physically and its impact in their mind. It concludes how the main characters suffer in the hands of oppressor and their hope to have a good life free from oppression.

Keywords: *oppression, tyranny, maltreatment, dictatorship, punishment.*

Note: The following abbreviations are used after abbreviations: PH – Purple Hibiscus

Oppression refers to an exercise of injustice, dictatorship, domination, patriarchy, brutality and suppression practised by the oppressor to expose his power and tyranny. The intention of the oppressor is to make the people understand that they have nothing to oppose the power and realise their meekness. It is happening everywhere. It talks about the unjust treatment faced by innocent people. The oppressor always wants to put the people in constant threat. If the people neglect to obey the oppressors, they enslaved or badly treated.

Females are marginalised in the name of convention and tradition in the society. They cannot show their voices. Male constructed society dominates them. Writers thoroughly expose oppression in all the genres of literature. Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison talk about female oppression their works. The oppression of subaltern people vocalises by writers like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Bama's *Karukku*, Rohinton Mistry's *So Many Hungers* and Perumal Murugan's *Seasons of the Palm*. Racism and discrimination exhibited through the works of authors like Harper Lee, Alice Walker and Khaled Hosseini.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the most evocative Nigerian novelist and a feminist. She has written novels about oppression like *Purple Hibiscus*. *Purple Hibiscus* displays dictatorship and how people suffer under the hands of oppressor. It is a novel set in the postcolonial Nigeria. It is a place where people faced political turmoil and difficulties. She has used few characters to show oppression.

The central character and the narrator of the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is Kambili Achike. She is a daughter of a wealthy factor owner Papa Eugene. He is a devout Christian who dominates all his family members. It is a novel about coming of age. Adichie has used Kambili to narrate the story. She expresses her wish to disintegrate her ties from her family and to become mature mentally and psychologically. Both Jaja, Kambili's brother and Kambili have

stayed in her Aunt's house, Papa's sister. Aunty Ifeoma's house is completely contrasted to Achike's household. It is a place where liberty occupies and the family members give complete freedom to expose their minds. It is where Kambili and Jaja open their voice and opinions. Kambili falls in love with the priest named Father Amadi when she was in Aunty Ifeoma's house. Mama Beatrice kills her husband using poison when she is not able to bear the sufferings. Jaja goes to prison for his mother. Meanwhile Aunty Ifeoma and her children left Nigeria to United States. The novel ends with the upcoming release of Jaja.

Papa Eugene is an oppressor in *Purple Hibiscus*. He oppresses all his family members and Igbo people. Kambili, Jaja and Mama Beatrice's life are controlled by Papa. He never gives importance to the feelings and emotions of them. One incident has showed the controlling power of Papa when the family members visit Father Benedict in his house. Mama Beatrice is not feeling well and not able to walk. She decides to stay in the car. It is clearly a reasonable one as she is ill. Papa thinks that it is a sin and assumes it as a selfishness. "Let me stay in the car and wait, *biko*," Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. 'I feel vomit in my throat.' . . . 'My body does not feel right.' She mumbled. 'I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car.' Mama looked up. 'I'll come with you. It's really not that bad.' Papa's face did not change. He waited for her to walk toward him," (PH 29)

Papa's male chauvinistic attitude reveals his tyranny, which is a horrible one to take control over every aspects of life. The people those who do not obey his order or to rebel against him, are his enemy or his opponent or selfish people. It discloses that Papa has authority to finalise anything and he does not give respect to his wife's words. He loses his patience and punishes her. This sort of violence is common in Papa's house.

Papa's strict rules contain the severe punishments given to blameless occurrence. One day, Kambili gets cramps. Mama understands her daughter's pain and wants to cure her. In order to control her cramp, she tells her to talk medicine secretly. For that, she has to take food before taking the medicine. Kambili has fear in her mind that her father instils. She reluctantly eats and takes medicine. Papa always wishes to give priority to the ritual of Mass than the well-being of his family members. Jaja and Mama are ready to take the responsibility but they do not have power to defend Kambili. His thought of sin and punishment for that sin as "He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-coated buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put that bowl down just as the belt landed on my back." (PH 102)

He blamed her for committing a sin. There is no further appeal for his words. He has shown his manliness to innocent people. All the three members are subjugated to his cruel treatment. They are familiar with his feeling of sin and punishment which is embedded in their mind. They then decide that they deserve to get punishment. Kambili actually does not commit sin. It is Papa who commits sin by torturing his family members. The religion, Christianity blinds his conscience.

It gives the glimpse of one thing that is related to court. Papa is a judge as well as a prosecutor. She is an accused or a guilty. He throws questions to get her answers. He asks all because he is not going to give disinterested judgement. Even if she answers him, he behaves like an uneducated man. His only intention is to give punishment to her in order to give food to his anger rather than make her to analyse the situation. He has no concern for her daughter. He

makes her daughter to believe that she was a sinner. He does so, to justify his judgement and leads her in a good path.

Papa, a dictator is continuously asking question about Papa-Nnukwu's staying to check how she answered him. Again, he talks about this incident as a sin. His daughter has done that "You should strive for perfection. You cannot see sin and walk straight into it". He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen." (PH 194) He stutters as Kambili stuttered when he is going to do wrong act in the name of punishment. He stresses him point that is, he is repeating this to make Kambili feel guilty. A chemist, in a laboratory, mixes and mingles one chemical with another chemical in order to find out the reaction formed and the final solution. Papa, like a chemist, pours hot water that he brought from the kettle into her leg slowly. Pouring hot water in that soft leg, he wants to realise the strength of the sin she had committed. He said that as "that is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet". (PH 194)

He always does not want her daughter to feel happy rather than made her to feel worried. That statement seems to be like a revenge. If a person does something to hurt someone, he aspires to do that to the same person. That is, the affected one wants to revenge another one in order to sow how he badly feels for the event. It never shows the justification of what is happened. It clearly exhibits the cruelty of Papa. He is incapable to catch that he was doing a wicked act. But he wishes that her daughter would be aware of the sin by sharing room with her grandfather, a heathen.

Papa can tell any story to show the justification for his maltreatment. A good human can never do any horrible things. He does not want to hurt anyone. A vengeance mind can do all these things. He wills to abuse others and gets pleasure on seeing the struggles of others. Papa wants to live a superior life like white people. He abandons his own culture and tradition and taken up the culture and tradition of others. That other convention also gives respect to the relationship of grandfather and grandchildren. It never asks its followers to give cruel treatment to those who wishes to maintain a relationship with their grandfather and grandmother.

Kambili brings the painting of her grandfather. She takes the painting and gives it to Jaja. He turns on to examine the image of him. She is foreshadowed instinct that they might catch by their father for having a photo of their grandfather. As Kambili is foreshadowed, they had caught red-handed by their father, Papa Eugene. Things starts to change from its original order. Papa threw fierce words to them in order to attack them psychologically. Papa asked, "What is that? Have you all converted to heathen? What are you doing with that painting? Where did you get it?" (PH 209) He asks them in a way as a police or an advocate raises so many questions in order to get what they wanted from the guilty. As a father, he can use mild words to get the answer. But he thrust harsh words towards his children.

Papa abducts it from them. He puts the paper under his foot to smash down. At the time, she feels that she has lost something that she cannot get it back. She has lost the memories of his father. He tears the picture into pieces. She imagines that Papa-Nnukwu's body cut into small pieces and stored in their fridge. Suddenly she falls on the floor to rescue the piece of papers that was having Papa-Nnukwu's face. At that time, she projects herself as a stubborn person and disobeys her father.

Papa thinks that, they do not feel regret for violating the order. Papa's fear on the death of Ade Coker and the downfall of his factories made him to lose his control. He cannot control his anger and he completely shows it on Kambili. Kambili's body is not a rock to walk on her with metal shoes. He has beaten her to death. He cannot tolerate on what Kambili and Jaja had done. In out of control, he throws words in the mixture of Igbo and English. "Get up!" Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from gaint mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hell fire."(PH 210) It shows another horrible scene in this novel. It is not what his religion has taught to do. His misunderstanding of Christianity leads him to do all. Ifeoma now comprehends the brutality and tyranny of her brother and his attitude to control everyone.

The corruption of government brings a new person to be the head of the state. Because of this, oppression has begun. The most affected people are the workers in the University of Nigeria. The administration has accused few for supporting the activist. They do not give their salary. It is taken over by an uneducated leader. It is not wrong to speak against the wrong deeds. The students are also affected because the potential and knowledgeable staffs have migrated to America. The students are suffered. Ifeoma has expressed her regret for the tyrannical government as it made the people to feel powerless. She says that it was like a cycle. There is no one to stop this tyrannical and cruel government. Obiora interrupts the conversation between Ifeoma and Auntu Chiaku. He disagrees with them. It makes Ifeoma to get anger. Adichie shows the harsh treatment of Ifeoma in this chapter. Moreover, this is the first and the last time, she discloses it.

The new administrator of University of Nigeria stops all the basic amenities to all the students. It kindles their rebelliousness. They have started the riot against the leader of the University. It clearly displays the anger of the people of Nigeria against the dictatorship and dominant of the leader of the head of state. If one gets violent action from anybody, he wants to show it in the same way as his opponent did. Here too, the tyranny of the government is opposed through the violence. Here is the best example.

Papa is playing a dual role in his life. One is a well-wisher and another one, a dictator. In public, he is an image of righteousness, justice, purity and uprightness and he never shows his pride when someone is appreciated and appraised him for what he has done. In his private life, that is, in his house, he always has a harsh mindset. It includes his punishment for committing a sin. His children are always submissive to him. They obey and respect him. They are even afraid of him. Kambili has exposed that his way giving cruel punishment has done for the welfare and betterment of his children. He uses this way to teach them the correct way to behave after if they had committed any crime.

One can comprehend that Papa is a primitive product because of his superiority in everything. He has followed the temper of the white missionary teacher from whom he learns that westerners are popular for being superior. From them, he works out that he has to cut all his ties from Igbo then only he became a good Christian or an enlightened man. Being superior has not taught by Christianity. He confuses Christianity with superiority. It is because of his misunderstanding. It leads a way for his violent act. He stops to do everything Igbo. He discontinues hearing and speaking in Igbo. He picks up English to talk with others than his native language. He starts to avoid the conventions and traditions of Igbo. He pauses to go to

temple of Igbo culture. He takes up the tradition of Christian. He goes to church on Sunday. He gets Holy Communion. He applies the commandments that he learned from the Bible. By stop doing anything Igbo makes him to be civilized one. He does not become aware of the barbarian attitude which he by doing superior.

Adichie handles a character to show oppression, violence, tyranny, brutality and cruelty. Papa is, like Hitler, a dictator to his family members and the Igbo people. He is the good example for an oppressor. She attains highest place in exposing the theme of oppression which happens in postcolonial Nigeria. Her wish is to make the people to become aware of oppression because it is the most horrible one. It has to be wiped out as it destroys the happiness and harmony of the people. The whole world will be happy if there is no man like Papa.

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